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The communication between County Administrative Boards and landowners about establishment of nature reserves

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Abstract: This thesis bases on eight interviews with County Administrative Boards' officers who take charge of the nature reserve issues. The officers perceive landowners as ordinary people. The most important factors which influence their communication are honest, empathy, pre-understanding, misunderstanding and so on. All the factors are related to trust. Learning is the way of improving communication. The officers need education and practice. More skills should be learned such as rhetoric and more time should be paid for communication of both exchanging experience with their colleagues and face to face meeting with landowners.

Keywords: Nature reserves, communicative factors, County

Administrative Boards, landowners

1. Introduction

Communication happens everywhere in the society. It is not like a linear model which Shannon and Weaver proposed by defining human communication as simply the transmission of information from a source to a receiver. Communication is symbolic action which assumes that language and symbols do more than transmit information but actively shape our understanding, create meaning, and orient us to a wider world (Cox, 2006). When comes to the environment issues, communication remains an important part.

Sweden has about 3200 nature reserves now, which total area is about 4 million hectares. According to one of the Swedish 16 environmental quality objectives-sustainable forests, more nature reserves will be built in the future. The majority of the nature reserves are established on the initiative of the County Administrative Boards (CABs). While a small amount of them are built by the municipalities. Nature reserves can be established on land owned by the state, municipalities or private landowners. In most cases the land belongs to one or several landowners. So the key of establishing a nature reserve is how the County Administrative Boards (CABs) convince the landowners to agree with establishment of the nature reserve on their land. Generally, the landowners have three options: first, sell the land to the states; second, get compensation for restriction of behavior on the land but still keep the land; third, exchange for another land. In the latter case it is hard to find an appropriate land for exchange. According to Swedish environmental law, the public interest is much higher than individual's interest. So if the CABs' experts think the land has high value for protection, they have legal right to declare a nature reserve without the agreement of the landowners. On the other hand, the landowners have the right to appeal to the court. Then the judge decides whether the nature reserve is legal or the landowner keeps his or her land. Anyway, these are not good options and few cases are done in these ways. A good communication between landowners and CABs can shorten the time of establishment and make the whole process smooth. Start from this point, research on the communication between landowners and CABs is necessary. How do the experts from CABs perceive the communication between them and landowners? What factors influence this process? What do they think can be improved? These questions will be answered in this thesis.

This thesis follows two tracks. One is the CABs' officers' views of communication between landowners and them. Another is the communication between the officers and me. I combine these two parts together.

2. Aim of the study and research questions

The aim of this thesis is to investigate answers of different nature reserve creators from CABs when asked about their perceptions of their work, conflicts and communication between them and landowners during their work, what factors influence the communication process, what is the restriction of the communication, what can be improved and so on. Then it discusses to what extent these responses mirror general trends.

To achieve this aim, I did my interviews based on the following questions:

1. Could you please tell me what is your responsibilities?
2. How do you do your work?

3. How do you communicate with landowners? Please give examples.
4. What do you perceive as difficulties in your work? How do you deal with them?
5. What are the important factors in your communication with landowners?
6. What do you think can be improved for the communication? Are there any restrictions?
7. How to improve the communication?
8. What is your perspective on environmental communication?

3. Methodology

3.1 Interviews

This thesis bases on eight interviews with officers in the County Administrative Board of Stockholm and Västmanlands who take charge of the nature reserve issues. Mostly, I used Open-ended and Semi-structured interview methods. At first I asked some open questions to have feelings of how these people work; tried leading them talk about their conflicts with landowners themselves and their communication strategies actively. Then I used close questions to focus on communication and conflicts. Before I went to the CABs, I had collected a lot of information about the nature reserve issues and prepared all the questions. I decided not to use a recorder in case the interviewees might feel uncomfortable and insecure. I would like them to feel free to express their feelings and give their real opinions. So I took notes during the interviews. I tried to write down as much as possible by recording at least the key words. After the interviews I typed what have been said in the interviews according to my notes and my memory. When I did this work, I reviewed the situation and tried to figure out the most important view they hold.

During the interviews, the interviewees influenced me on how I organized a sentence, which word I chose to express the meaning and which direction of the flow I followed. For example, one interviewee was a new officer who just worked at the CAB for three month. So she does not have so many experience of communicating with landowners. In that interview I focused on the officer's view on communication factors instead of asking for examples of working experience. On the other hand, I also had influence on the interviewees. Some terminology I used confused them such as communication skills, environmental communication. Some interviewees asked me to explain more, some thought hard and tried to formulate some sentences and then changed the topic to something they know. Different people have different ways of answering. Some officers answered my questions directly. They gave long answers with a lot of information. So I could easily get the information I want. Others answered indirectly. They were quiet and gave short answers. I had to ask many times in different ways and picked up the information from their words. Sometimes they answered my previous questions when they are asked the other questions. I rephrased and summarized their answers and opinions, and repeated key words during the process. Sometimes they could find the right word in my sentences to express themselves. And they did self reflection about their work during the interviews. They were also aware of something missed before during this interview process.

3.2 Assumptions

I used abductive research method during this study. Information collection is the first step. I did a lot of information searching on the internet to get the overview of this issue, such as the process of establishment of nature reserves, related rules and regulations. My supervisor and Swedish classmates told me what they know about this issue. Based on all the information I made the following assumptions:

1. There are conflicts between CABs and landowners during the process of creating a nature reserve.
2. The officers and landowners don't like each other.

3.3 Constraints and advantages of methodology

As all the data I have is from the interviews with people who take charge of the nature reserve issues, not based on my own experiment or observation, it may influence the result in several ways. The accuracy of the data is depends on what extent the interviewees are honest to the questions. Because we have not the same mother tongues, there are some difficulties in the communication. The interviewees have little time of deliberation about the questions since the interviews were taken in one or two hours. They have to answer the questions without too much thinking. All these factors will affect the accuracy of the conclusion.

On the other hand, the interview method can save a lot of time and money on research. You get a lot of information in one hour.

4. Theory

4.1 Symbolic interactionism

To have a good understanding of communication between the landowners and CABs' officers as well as the communication between the officers and me, it is necessary to know symbolic interactionism. For example, the officers have their own views on landowners. To understand why they have these perceptions, we need to know what perspectives are and how perspectives form. And the landowners behave differently. Why do they behave in different ways on the same issue? Meanwhile officers and I have different views on their work. Therefore, we need symbolic interactionism to understand all of these phenomenons.

Symbolic interactionism which focuses on interaction is a perspective we can use to understand the human society. To understand human action, we must focus on social interaction, human thinking, definition of the situation, the present and the active nature of the human being (Charon, 2007).

A perspective is an angle on reality, a place where the individual stands as he or she looks at and tries to understand reality (Charon, 2007). Perspectives formed after a period of interaction. Then people see the world through these perspectives. Everyone one has more than one perspective. Perspectives influence and guide what we see and what we believe, then what we see and believe influence what we do (Charon, 2007).

Human beings interpret or "define" each other's actions instead of merely reacting to each other's actions (Blumer, 1998). When people try to interpret others' actions, their focus is not on the action itself but the meaning behind the action. Human being has a self which means human being can be the object of his own actions. So they

don't just define others' action but also their own. Human beings have actions toward self including self- communication, self- perception and self- control. The human beings will indicate themselves the thing which they have conscious about. First, give the thing a meaning or make it into an object. Then, his action is constructed (Blumer, 1998). His own actions are also on basis of the meaning. Human beings also define the environment by using their perspectives. As their perspectives change in the process of interaction, their definition of the environment also changes all the time.

Symbols are social objects used to represent. Representation is what we use to communicate (Charon, 2007). Words are one type of symbols. We use language to communicate with each other. It is symbol made us human beings.

The key for learning new perspectives and understanding each other is that we take the role of other's. Take the role of others is an act of imagination which allowed people to see how someone else thinks and sees, to see how they are defining the situation (Charon, 2007). When you see the world from someone else's perspective, you are more likely to understand that person's behaviour. That can help clear up misunderstandings.

4.2 Some definitions

Here I would like to clarify the definitions of some words I will use in this thesis and I have used in the interviews.

Definition of the situation: the definition of situation is the sum total of all recognized information, from the point of view of the actor, which is relevant to locating self and others, so that he or she can engage in self-determined lines of action and interaction (Charon cited Ball, 2007)

Needs: needs can be thought of as resources life requires to sustain itself which contain no reference to specific people taking specific action (Rosenberg, 2004).

Perspective: perspective is not a response to a stimulus but something used as a guide to definition and action. It is not an internal trait but something belonging to, arising in, shared in, and changing in social interaction. (Charon, 2007)

Environmental communication: environmental communication is the pragmatic and constitutive vehicle for our understanding of the environment as well as our relationships to the natural world; it is the symbolic medium that we use in construction them (Cox, 2006).

5. CABs officers' view on landowners

During all the interviews I never asked for the officers' attitudes on landowners, but they definitely gave me a lot of their view on landowners as human, their behaviour, their interests and so on. I think the officers have a lot of experiences and want to share with others. They have the need of being heard. Through my questions they also reflected on their work, reviewed it and realized something being missed before.

5.1 Landowners are ordinary people

As my assumption the officers of CABs don't like the landowners. But during the interviews it seemed the officers really understood the landowners' situation and wanted to talk to them. For the interviewees just few extreme cases are problematic.

“They are ordinary people as you and me.” “Most of the people are good. They have the general actions as you expected.” “If I am a landowner, I would like to decide by myself about my land also.” “She is decisive. She just goes by feelings not reasonable.” “It’s hard to communicate with some landowners. They don’t even talk to me.” Basically, the officers think the landowners are ordinary and their behaviour is understandable. But there are some extreme cases which made some officers think the landowners are hard to communicate.

The officers’ perspective towards landowners is formed during the process of interaction. It influenced by the officers’ pre-experience. When the officer said “they are ordinary people as you and me”, he compared the landowners’ action and other people’s action in his pre-experience. His perspective of “ordinary people” was formed during his social life, started when he was a child. He used this perspective to see the landowners and defined the situation and the landowners’ actions as “ordinary”. It is the same when another officer said “she just goes by feelings not reasonable”. When the officer used his pre-experience to check the landowner’s action, he can’t find why she behaved as she was. Through that officer’s perspective the landowner’s action is not reasonable.

Taking the roles of others is important in human behaviour. It is the same as take the perspective of others to see the world from the standpoint of someone else (Charon, 2007). When the officer said “if I am a landowner...”, he took the role of the landowners, thought from their point of view and felt their feelings. Then he understood more why the landowners didn’t like to build nature reserves on their land. And know how to communicate with landowners better. But no one can exactly take the other person’s perspective since your own perspective influences the process of how you capture the perspective of others. But the effort to do this is something we do. If we are highly capable in it, then we will be able to understand others, communicate clearly to others what we desire, understand the expectations of others so we are able to conform, rebel, or pick and choose, influence others, gain power, contribute to the welfare of others, or build lasting friendship with others (Charon, 2007).

5.2 Landowners’ different interests

According to the interviewees landowners have different interests. All the interviewees have an agreement on this. Base on their understanding there are several types of landowners who have different interests on this nature reserve issue. The first type of landowners is really interested in what kinds of species or biotopes are valuable on their land, why they are valuable and specific. The second type of landowners is interested in how much money they can get. The third type landowners usually the one who live on the land for a long time don’t want to have the nature reserves at all. Others care about other issues such as the hunting on the land after establishing the nature reserve or riding roads and so on. The officers think when the land is passed from one generation to the next generation, the new generation don’t care about the land that much, they just care about the money. Some landowners have job in the city, so they don’t live on the land. In that case they don’t usually care so much about the land. They may hire somebody to manage the land or just leave it as it is. This kind of landowners will be happy to get the compensation. For the people who live on their land for decades they have a very deep relation with the land both about emotion and the daily life. They don’t like to be constrained by the rules, just want to do whatever they want on their own land. Landowners’ interests on this issue also influence the process. It can make the length of the establishment period from 2

months to 5 years.

“People have the capacity for independent thought based on their individual values and experiences. We are all different and our choice and interpretation of information is influenced by our individual experiences” (Nitsch, 2000). Several officers mentioned that landowners who live in the city and who live on the land, their thoughts are different. For people who live on the land, the land is more than a property. I think they played in the forest when they were children, walked their dogs every morning. Their memory is full of the land. So they are interested on their land, care about what will be done on it, or they don’t want to build nature reserves. When they first receive the information of establishing a nature reserve on their land, they define the situation insecure. They feel like losing their land. But for people who have jobs in cities they don’t have emotion about the land. It’s just a land, a property. So those people are willing to get the money.

6. Communication process and communication strategies

6.1 Communication process

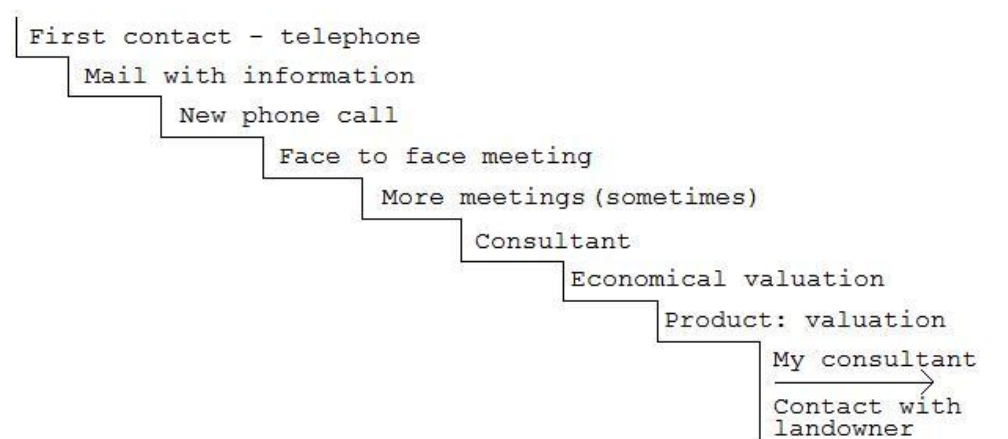


Figure 3. The communication process of establishment of nature reserves

The CABs initiatively establish nature reserves. So the officers contact the landowners positively. The first contact with landowner is a telephone call on which officers informs him or her that the CAB is interested in establishing a nature reserve on his or her land. Then they send the landowner all the paper files of information with a map of proposed boundary of the nature reserve. After about two weeks, they call the landowner again and book a face to face meeting. On the first meeting they talk about how specific the land is, what the procedure is, what options the landowner have and so on. A lot of meetings with the landowners and other stakeholders follow depending on how things are going. If the first meeting is not going well the process may stuck on the meeting section. This section can last from 1 month to 2 years. After the landowner agrees to make an economical valuation of the land the case is handed to the consultant and the economical valuator. The valuator will calculate the amount of compensation based on the land’s or the woods’ market values. This will take 2 to 3 months. At last the consultant negotiates with landowner to attain an agreement. If the landowner wants to hire a consultant, the CABs will pay for that. Then the agreement will be attained between two consultants. This period lasts form 1 month to 3 years. Usually, it takes 2 to 3 years to establish a nature reserve.

One of the interviewees drew a coordinate axis (Figure 2) which shows the relationship between landowners' acceptance and different steps of the establishment process base on his experience.

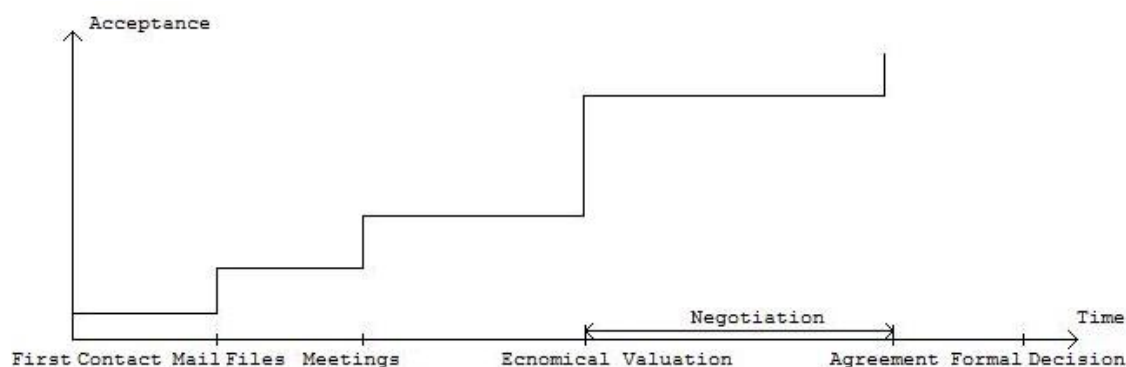


Figure 2. The acceptance of landowners through time

6.2 Conflicts or Difficulties?

As my assumption there are a lot of conflicts between landowners and CABs since landowners are not happy with losing their lands. Meanwhile officers are not happy with landowners' disagreement. But not all the officers I interviewed think it in that way. Most of them don't perceive them as conflicts. One interviewee said: "We have difficulties during the work with landowners, but I won't say they are conflicts." According to Daniels and Walker (2001, p26), conflict is an inevitable part of human interaction, regardless of the arena in which it occurs. As long as humans encounter one another, conflict occurs. Glasl (1999, p18) states a social conflict as a situation where at least one "agent" experiences a difference in such a way that the actions of another "agent" restrict the way in which she lives out or realizes her own ideas, feelings or intentions. With these definitions of conflict, when the landowners disagree with the officers, conflict occurs. The landowners restrict the way in which the officers realize their intentions of establishing nature reserves. The officers restrict the way in which the landowners realize their intentions of having the land and doing whatever they want. Why do the officers avoid mentioning the word "conflict"? My interpretation is the officers don't have the definition of conflict. Conflicts have different levels. It can be a small argument or a world war. Escalating conflicts have nine steps. The first step is discussion argumentation. The signs of this step include opinions stiffen, clashes, tensions, sidestepping, speaking past one another, temporary alliances and so on (Glasl, 1999). The officers may perceive conflict as something serious and big. They don't see landowners' disagreement with their intentions as a conflict. Therefore they used the word "difficulty".

Thus, I changed my question to ask what they perceive as difficulties in their work and how they deal with these difficulties. I got several different answers.

One answer is the difficulty is lack of time and people to communicate with the landowners. "We have a lot of other work to do. The landowners have to wait. In one case, the landowner waited for one year to meet me after my first call." There is no solution for this difficulty now. The officer has to postpone the process until both he and the landowners have time to talk. The second answer is "The difficulty is we want something else than the landowner. In that case, I will have a discussion with my boss and then tell the landowner the last decision." The third answer is "The difficulty is

how to persuade the landowners to accept the nature reserve plan.” The solution of this difficulty is offering different options to the landowners. For example, they change the boundary to smaller area, and allow the landowner to build a road through the nature reserve and so on.

From the first answer we can see the officer don’t think communication is difficult but is something need more time and people to handle. For the second officer he has conflicts with landowners and thinks they are something difficult to handle. When he has divergency with landowners, he will go to the higher authority for more instructions. The third officer’s way of conflict management is giving information and making compromise.

6.3 Communication strategies and conflict management

The officers don’t have awareness of communication strategies. When I asked what strategies you use to communicate, the officers’ answer is “we don’t have special or given strategies. We just talk.” But for me they have a lot of different communication strategies. The officers and I have different understanding of the word “strategy”. For the officers the communication strategy may be a booklet came from up level which written how to communicate and the action steps of communication. For me communication strategy is how you communicate with other people and how you design a communication. Cox (2006, p258) defines strategy as a specific plan to bring about a desired outcome. Well in their description I can recognize several ways of conflict management.

One officer mentioned he usually waited for two weeks after the first call and then called again to book a time for face to face conversation. He chooses to meet the landowner in the forest so they can have a walk and he can explain the valuable species and show the boundary to the landowner. Or he will choose to have a conversation in the landowner’s house that can make the landowner feel comfortable and relaxed. During the first meet he can find out whether this nature reserve plan is a problem for the landowner or not and what the landowner’s concerns are-money, value of the land and species or anything else. This is a very clear strategy designed by the officer. Each action has its aim behind. He has awareness of place, time, atmosphere and so on.

“In one case the landowner didn’t want to talk to me at all. I had to repeat the options several times. I listened what he wanted. I didn’t force him, I can wait.” In this specific case, the landowner has conflict with the officer. This officer’s strategy is trying to understand the landowner’s situation, hearing his need, at the same time giving him information and time to accept the situation.

“The landowners don’t like the nature reserve. They may stick in their mind thinking about why CAB wants to do this. I try to not let him focus on that but move on to the solution of the problem, put out a goal for him.” This officer’s strategy is moving the focus to common interest.

One of the interviewee thinks the landowner’s consultant can help a lot. “The consultant can help the landowner understand the situation.” The CABs pay for the landowner’s consultant is the obvious sign of their positive view on this. Third party intervention is a way of conflict management. The consultant can help each side to find out common interest and focus on every opportunity for fostering empowerment and recognition. The focus should be parties’ attention on these opportunities and

encouraged and helped them to respond in ways that exploited their potential for growth and transformation (Bush & Folger, 1994, p113).

“I listen to them. Let them talk. Think about why they are disappointed...The tone of your voice...Show your empathy” “I said to the landowners that I understand their situation and their feelings but the rule is like this I can do nothing to help them. Then they understand this is not personal but because of the rules.” “We will keep on talking and try to change the landowners’ mind. Wait and talk. Time can make things smooth. One year later the situation can be much better. During this period I keep on contact with the landowner. The landowners may think the officers are working very hard and appreciate it.” These officers use empathy as their strategy. They both show their compassion to the landowners and make the landowners have compassion on them. Time is also a key point. Situations can be changed during one year or even longer time. The landowner may have an emergency which need money such as need money to update machines or divorce.

Although sometimes the officers can communicate with the landowners very well by using their own ways, in my opinion their unawareness of communication strategies will cause problems in dealing with conflicts and communicative difficulties. The officers lack language for talking about communicative methods and experiences. Therefore, when communication has problems or conflicts occur, they can hardly find the key to solve them very soon. That may be the reason why they need to wait for a long time to finish their work.

7. Important factors of communication

A lot of factors influence communication. Which ones do the officers think are important in the communication with landowners? What do they think can be done to improve the communication? Among all the answers there are some similarities and differences.

7.1 Similarities of the officers’ view

Honest

Honest is one of the most popular words in the answers of this question. The officers said they are honest to the landowners. They try to explain how specific and valuable the land is and they build the nature reserve to protect the biotope and biodiversity for the future generation. Honest can increase trust in the communication. The officers show their honesty to gain trust. Only if the landowners trust the situation and the officer can they feel safe and cooperate with the officers.

Listen to landowners’ need

“Take care of what are important for the landowners. Make the solution better for them.” “The landowners usually know the land very well, we have to listen and understand if they want to do something.” “I listen a lot; let them talk; think about why they are disappointed.” “We do anything we can to make the landowners happy except give up the idea.” “...try to be a good listener...” I interpret these as pay attention to the landowners’ need. We “say a lot” by listening for other people’s feelings and needs (Rosenberg, 2003). People have the need of being understood and being heard, listen to them is the best way of communication. When the landowners express their feelings and needs, they review them and get new understandings of their situation. The officers see the landowners’ needs and also understand more about

their situation. Then the landowners feel much better and the officers have empathy on them. The two parts now calm down and tame to each other. The situation improved then.

7.2 Different focuses

Information

“We need to give information to the landowners.” As the classical communication model which I explained in the theory part, information (message) is passed by the sender to the audiences in order to achieve a specific effect (Nitsch, 2000). It’s not the case to achieve the specific effect just by sending information, but the information is the stimuli of triggering this effect. Sears et al (1985) found learning the message is the first step of attitude change. After received the message, if the audience can learn from it change will follow.

Compassion

One interviewee said show your compassion in the communication with landowners can make things smooth. It’s like lubrication. The landowners usually think the officers are rigid, ice cold or even non-human. After you listen to them and show your compassion, they can understand it is not personal.

Any attempt to resolve conflict will aim to liberate oneself and others from the prison of one’s own feelings and moods and to regain access to the other party through the ability to empathize (Glasl, 1999). Empathy can help both sides by making them have willing to cooperate. They are able to see each other personally after empathy. Empathy allows us “to re-perceive our world in a new way and to go on” (Rosenberg, 2003).

Personality

“Certain types of people are good at communication. It’s personality, it’s an accident.” The individual organism is shaped by various combinations of heredity and environment, social and non-social forces (Charon, 2007). It’s hard to say how the personality shaped. But obviously previous experience takes a key role of all the factors. We use past in our definition of the present (Charon, 2007). We can learn from our past experiences, shape our personality and perspectives which guide our actions at present. People who are good at communication must have a lot of experience of interacting with different kinds of people and handling different situations. They learned how to communicate from their pre-experiences and use the skills at present.

Transfer the focus and keep on moving

“The landowners sometimes stick on their own mind. They can’t stop thinking about why we want to establish the nature reserve.” One officer said he tried to transfer landowners’ focus onto other things such as what the next step was, tried to keep the things going. And it was good to remember that he was there to get the job done. Sticking on one stage was not good for the situation. But I still think he had better keep in mind that he should not force people to think and behave. When the landowners feel being forced to accept the nature reserves proposal, they may have more intense actions against the proposal.

Participatory

“The landowner should know the whole process, what the next step is, what options they have and so on. Let them know all issues from beginning. No surprise, The more they involve in, the better.” The officers try to involve the landowners in the process of establishing a nature reserve. They ask for advice and suggestions from the landowner on how to manage the land. The landowners know their land very well and they always have good ideas. They become more positive when they get involved in the issue. The more you participate the more you become interested in the issue. Then you care about the issue, and are willing to do something to improve it.

Pre-understanding

The officers said they thought the CABs had bad reputation among landowners and the landowners felt they lost their land. So before the officers go to the land, the landowner has already disliked the idea. They are angry and upset. Some landowners also have bad reputation among officers. The officers have already perceived them as a difficulty even before they meet each other. Getting rid of this pre-understanding and bad mood can make the communication process smoother. It is also related to the perspective. Perspectives sensitize the individual to see parts of reality (Charon, 2007). This pre-understanding can lead to misunderstanding.

Misunderstanding

Misinterpretations occur because of two different reasons: either one of the actors fail in their perspective sharing or one of the actors does something slightly different from what she has planned to do, struggling with words, contaminating two expressions, behave un-synchronised between body and talk, open up for interpretations she did not aimed to (Hallgren, Unpublished). When both landowner and the officer have their perspective of the other part is rigid, mad and unreasonable, they misunderstand each other. One officer said after his first meeting with the landowner, he found out that guy was not as bad as he heard from his colleagues before. If a misunderstanding is detected and repaired, the actors will learn something about their common way to interact and as a consequence they will increase their trust to the interaction situation (Hallgren, Unpublished).

All factors explained before are related to each other. And all of them lead me to one word “trust”. Whatever the officers do aims at increasing trust between them and the landowners. Trust is the basic factor of effective communication. On the contrary, officers may take actions of decreasing trust without consciousness. I interpret the officers’ wish to transfer the focus of the landowners as an action of decreasing trust. The landowners may feel the officers don’t understand them and force them to continue. If the landowners were confirmed, they may feel being understood and leave all their good arguments behind, keep on moving then.

7.3 Improvements in the future

More time for face to face communication

“It’s good to see each other more often.” “We lack of time and people to have enough contact with landowners.” Face to face communication is better than telephone calls and e-mails. When you meet a person face to face, you have an overview of him or her, not just voice but image. And you can talk more than the issue, know the landowners personally. Some officers mentioned that it will be good

for the job if you have other levels of relationship with the landowners. And the more you meet the landowners the better.

Education and exchange experiences

“Our effort and skills have improved over the years but we can improve further by more education and gathering experiences.” “We need education and discuss with other people who do the same work and learn from each other.” There is a communication course held by the cooperation of SLU (Swedish university of agriculture sciences) and SEPA (Swedish environmental protection agency). Several officers attended this course and learned something from it. “It is a good course which allows me to reflect on my work and think about details.” “The communication course is very good. It offers tool box to communicate, react and behaviour. It also allows us to see the landowners’ needs and perspectives, to understand other people.” “The course doesn’t teach you a lot about specific communication strategies but makes you think about how you communicate...It was helpful but I had wished for more practical advice that I could use in my everyday work”

Education and experience are two ways of learning. The officers can learn how to communicate through both of them. The teacher can teach them the theory and give them tools. Exchanging ideas can make them learn from their own and others’ experience. Learning is often about being surprised by the experience (Long, 2004). Kolb’s learning cycle includes 1. Concrete experience 2. Observation and reflection 3. Formation of abstract concepts and 4. Testing in new situations (Blackmore, 2007). Exchange experiences can improve the second step. First the officers have their own experiences and then exchange experience with each other to reflect and formulate abstract concepts. After that they need to practice in new situations.

More practice of communication

“I want more opportunity to practice. You need more experiences to be better. You have the communication tools and need to practice them and see if they works.” “The top level should pay attention to the communication and give us time to do this that will be good. It is very important if the instruction come from the top.” Practice makes perfect. Officers can improve and learn more skills through practice in real life. This is the forth step of Kolb’s learning cycle. Only through this step can officers learn new knowledge.

Rhetoric and discourse

Some officers mentioned that they want to learn how to argue. “People can sale cars very well. How about environment? We need to ‘sale’ the environment as commerce. It’s very important to learn this from other field.” “Let them feel that they are saving the world. Give them a good picture of future.” Environmental rhetoric and discourse is a key part of Environmental communication. The way we communicate with one another about the environment powerfully affects how we perceive both it and ourselves and, therefore, how we define our relationship with the natural world (Cox, 2006). You can choose the way you spread the information, which word you use and how you formulate the sentences. What you say will influence the others and also how you say it. For me, argument has two aspects. On the one hand, it may help the officers to convince the landowners. On the other hand, the officers’ wish of convincing the landowners can lead to conflicts or difficulties. My teacher Lars once said “you cannot change people’s mind, but they can change themselves” when he

gave a lecture about changing attitude. So what the officers need to do is letting the landowners change their mind by themselves instead of convincing them.

All in all, the way of improving communication is learning. People can gain power from knowledge. Communication skills can be learned through education and practice. Therefore increase a good communication.

8. What is Environmental communication?

Environmental communication is a study of the ways in which we communicate about the environment, the effects of this communication on our perceptions of both the environment and ourselves, and therefore on our relationship with the natural world (Cox, 2006). I got several general comments from the interviewees. "I don't think Environmental communication differs from other kinds of communication." "I think the Environmental communication include a lot of work. It can happen at different levels." "Environmental Communication is like a small baby. It's new and interesting." "I think people work in Environmental communication can get a lot of different opinions very soon. The Environmental communication improved and developed a lot in the past two decades." Seems the officers don't familiar with Environmental communication.

When I asked the question "What is your perspective on Environmental communication?" many interviewees asked me to repeat or explain more about what it is mean. Someone said "I don't quite understand what you mean, but for me environmental communication is..." Someone looked confused and hesitated but still tried to formulate some sentences or transfer to something else. People prefer to talk about the thing they are familiar with and avoid trapped in the topic they are not familiar with.

9. Self reflection

I felt so luck to contact the right persons at the beginning who helped me to arrange other interviews and be my interviewees at the same time. One of the officer said he checked my identity with my supervisor before replied to my e-mail. This is because I didn't use my university e-mail address. After my supervisor explained to him, he was more willing to help me. This is the power of authority. The professor has the powerful words. And also my university has a good reputation among the County Administrative Boards that really do help me to contact people.

My experience of having interviewees with the officers gives me some impression of them and their work. The officers are so kind of accepting my request. They are all very nice people. Some of the officers are very talkative and have a lot experiences wanted to share with me. Some of them are young. Though they don't have too many experiences still they are willing to help me and answering questions honestly. Most of the officers have the background of biology or botany. They don't have so much knowledge about communication. Most of their communication skills are learned from their experience. The good news is the officers are really like their job. They are willing to communicate with people and want to learn more about how to communicate.

10. Conclusion

Although my study is based on eight interviews, the trend I see from these eight officers' perspectives indicates the general trend of all the officers at some extent. The communication factors and aspects need to be improved I found out during these interviews maybe can help their future work.

The officers perceive landowners as ordinary people who have the expected reactions not as the same as my assumption that they don't like each other. While they do have conflicts but the officers deny them. They define the situation as difficulties. The officers don't have awareness of communication strategies when they use them. They know the reasons of every action they taken and have plans of how to communicate with landowners. Each officer has his or her own preferable strategies which according to his or her social experiences and communication skills. Honest and consider landowners' needs are important communication factors is the most common view of the officers. While each officer has his or her focuses including compassion, information, personality, participatory, pre-understanding, misunderstanding and so on. All the factors relate to trust. Increasing trust becomes the fatal point of communication. To improve the communication the officers need education and exchange experiences with colleagues where they can both learn from theories and experiences. More time needed for face to face communication and practice the communication knowledge they learned.

The officers have the awareness of communication. They do think communication is important in their work and want to learn more.

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